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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE — Radio Service — OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT Monday, December 20, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "CHRISTMAS FARE FROM FOREIGN LANDS." Items of interest to women, from the Federal Food and Drug Administration, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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This morning, while I washed the breakfast dishes, I was reminded of an old song in "Poor Robin's Almanack." It goes like this:

"Observe how the chimneys
Do smoak all about,
The cooks are providing
For dinner no doubt."

For Christmas dinner, no doubt. In our neighborhood, at most any hour of the day, you can smell the sweet and spicy odors of Christmas cakes and puddings.

And, this being Monday, the day for our news letter from the Federal Food and Drug Administration, I was feeling a bit sorry for our Washington correspondent. Surely, I thought, these few days before Christmas, it must be very difficult to prepare reports about dangerous drugs -- elixir sulfanilamide, dinitrophenol, and cinchophen. Has our Washington correspondent no Christmas spirit?

Well, it seems she has. Her letter, which the postman brought a couple of hours later, is all about nuts and spices, figs and dates, and other exotic Christmas fare.

"Do you ever stop to think," she writes, "about the amazing progress made in food transportation? Here we are, in a comparatively new country, and we can get almost any food we want, no matter how far away it grows. Tea, coffee, fruits, nuts, spices -- whatever we want.

"And, thanks to the Federal Food and Drug Administration, only sound and wholesome foods are allowed to enter this country. As you know, one of the duties of the Federal officials, under the Food and Drugs Act, is to examine the food products that enter the United States, and to see that those not fit for food purposes are destroyed, or excluded from the country. In all ports of entry, you will find food inspectors -- in Boston and New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Atlanta and New Orleans, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle.

"Perhaps you did not know," -- I'm still quoting -- "Perhaps you did not know that all foreign merchants are required to certify -- before the proper United States consular officials abroad -- to certain facts concerning the food products they want to ship over here. The certificates are attached to the invoices of the various products -- tea, coffee, nuts, cocoa beans --

and come to the attention of the Administration officials at the time the goods are being appraised for duty by the customs authorities. If for any reason it appears that the articles may not comply with the Food and Drugs Act, inspectors take samples for analysis. Meanwhile, the entire shipment is held.

"Now let's look over the list of food products that come from distant lands. Here's a common one -- cocoa beans, from the Gold Coast of Africa. Some of them come from the West Indies and South America, too, but our main supplies come from the Gold Coast, which means they must travel thousands of miles by sea -- a hard trip for a perishable food product. During the past year, we imported around 600 million pounds of cocoa beans, of which approximately 45 percent were sampled and examined. The number of shipments detained because of mold and so forth was greater than in 1936, and the percentage of beans rejected jumped from 0.16 to 3 percent."

Next, something about nuts. Quoting directly: "Our Brazil nuts come from South America; filberts, chestnuts, almonds, and walnuts from Europe; coconuts from the West Indies, Ceylon, South America, and from India. India also sends us pistachio nuts, as do Turkey and Persia. From China, or rather from Manchuria, we get many shipments of walnuts. Even peanuts are imported sometimes -- from China.

"Other products that keep inspectors busy when round-the-world ships come in from the Orient are spices and condiment seeds. Annual importations in the Eastern District amounted to more than 260 million pounds. Of this amount, more than four and a half million pounds were detained. As Mr. Campbell states in his annual report: 'While some slight improvement in the quality of spices is noted, the situation is far from satisfactory. Oilseeds, amounting to something over 8 million pounds, principally sesame seeds, were inspected in the Western District, and more than three and a half million pounds were detained.'

"Next on our list of imported foods is dried fruit -- figs and dates. Dried figs come from Turkey, Italy, Greece, the upper coast of Africa, and Portugal. Our biggest supply of imported dried figs comes from Smyrna.

"Dates we import from the countries around the Persian Gulf -- Arabia, Persia, Iraq -- and from Northern Africa. Last year inspectors examined more than 62 million pounds of imported dates. More than 2 million pounds, or 3.6 percent of the total, were detained as unfit for food.

"As for figs, inspectors examined almost six and a half million pounds of this imported delicacy. The percentage detained was about 9.4 percent, or about twice that of last year."

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